

The Moribund Cult sent me *Cocaine* in the mail. It's an album by Italy's **V.E.G.A.** (Vacuum Era Gelid Atmosphere). Halfway into it, I was feeling the bile from my stomach rise in revulsion. It was so sick and so extreme, minus any identifiable musical property whatsoever, that I found myself dizzy and nauseous. I began to get gassy. A trip to the bathroom didn't help. It was still on when I returned, only worse. I was stymied into a paralysis of nerve-shattering inaction, unable to even turn the infernal thing off. "I'm going to kill whoever sent this to me," I thought.

I hated it.

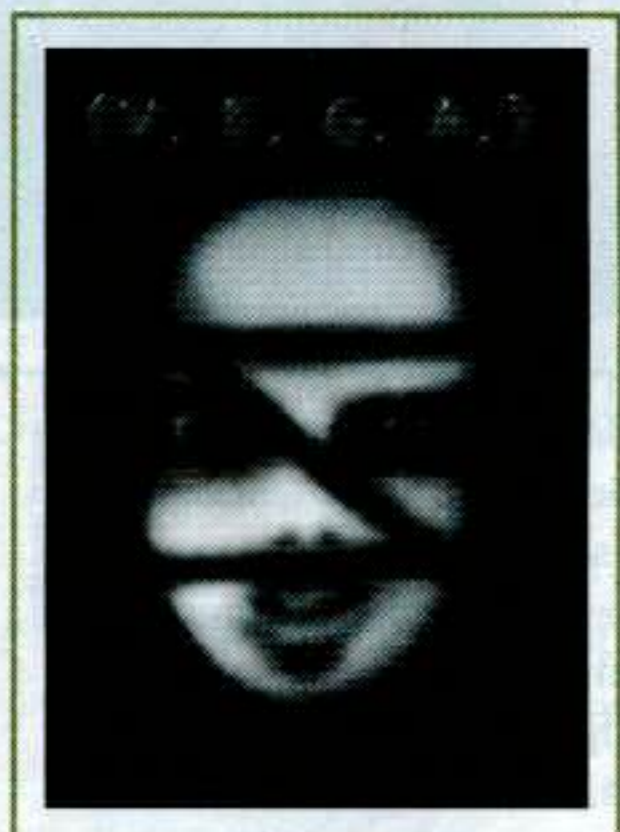
Soon, though, almost as if the CD itself knew the damage it was inflicting on my psyche, a new sound emerged...one of healing. It was like a salve to a burn. Melodic. Creepy, but cool-creepy. Instrumental. Still, I waited in dread for that demented lead shrieker to start his caterwauling again. And he did. Do people

really listen to this kind of stuff?

V.E.G.A. started in the late '90s in the little village of Turin.

Singer/guitarist/synthesizer player Ravez, singer/songwriter/drummer Janos and crazyman bassist Kekoz knew that the sounds they were unearthing were akin to pagan idolatry. So they moved to Norway.

Their first album, in 2000, was described as "dark, ambient, raw, schizophrenic black metal." Their second album, in 2002, was described as "industrial black metal." *Cocaine* can-



not be described at all. It can only be felt. Still, those who try, simply describe it as "sick extreme music."

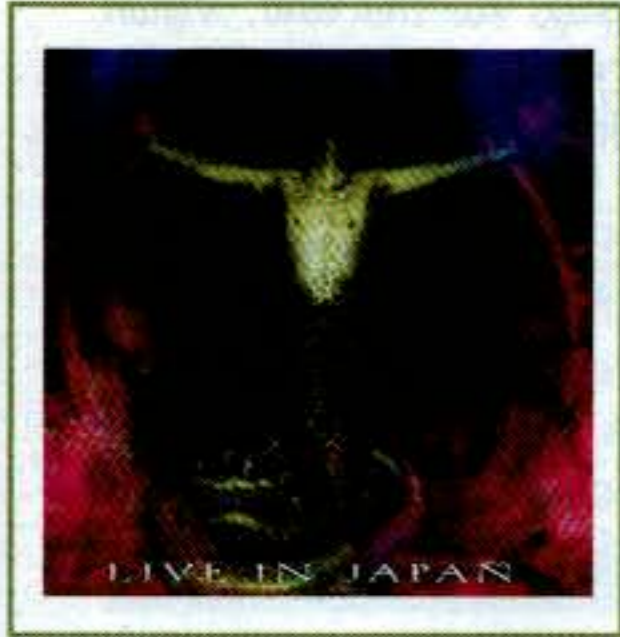
They got that right. I hope I never have to hear it again.

Much better is *Kingdom* by **Vader**. Originally released in 1998, re-released now by MVD Audio with two new tracks, one is reminded



just how forward-thinking and mysterious this band always was. I dare say *Kingdom* sounds better in 2007 than 1998! Just under 30 minutes, the hard-charging death-defying circus-of-sound is a non-stop joyride of monumental proportions, action-packed and percussive as hell. Here, the original five tracks—"Creatures Of Light And Darkness," "Breath Of Centuries," "Kingdom" and "Anamnesis"—are joined by a remix of "Inhuman Disaster" (inspired by Heading For Internal Darkness) and "Quicksilver Blood Mix" (inspired by Carnal).

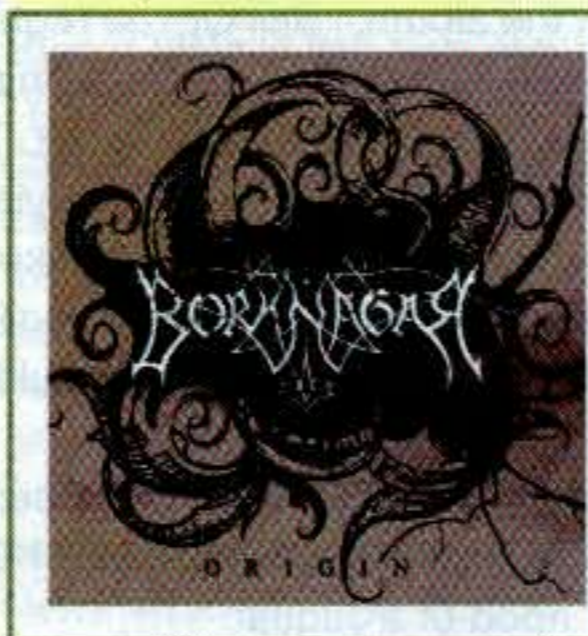
Speaking of Vader, *Live In Japan* has also been re-released by MVD. Although not as good as *Kingdom* (how could it be with fans cheering?), it's still an accurate time capsule to this Eastern Block band's foray into Tokyo's Club Quatro in '98. Utilizing mostly early material, they



VADER



slay, sure, but I've never been a fan of live albums (exception to the rule: *Live At Leeds* by The Who). With a whopping 19 tracks (it ends with the "Kingdom" video!), the hour-plus gets a bit monotonous after awhile but serves as a reminder that Vader is and has always been right up there with Morbid Angel, Deicide and Cannibal Corpse for deathly honors.



Borknagar have been Norway's bad boyz since 1995. A mutual friend of mine and the band's told me earlier this year, "believe me, Mike, you do not want to hang out with these guys." I believe it. Hey, they may or may not burn down churches in their home country but, uh, put it this way, you won't find them adding to the collection plate on Sunday mornings. With *Epic* (2004), *Empiricism* (2001), *Quintessance* (2000), *The Archaic Course*

(1998), *The Older Domain* (1997) and their self-titled 1996 debut, they have put out a consistent catalog of extreme that never fails to ignite the imagination and make the hair on the back of my neck stand straight up. I may not like their politics, but I would never miss any album they ever put out. Until now. Last year's *Origin* (Century Media) had me befuddled. And it still does. I recently put it back on after initially dismissing it in October of 2006 and guess what? It still sounds terrible. Acoustic, boring, folk-based, the singing is so god-awful that it makes one pine for the wounded lion roar of old. Flutes, woodwinds, piano, organ, choirs, shit, if I want to hear this stuff, I'll listen to Jethro Tull, at least they do it good.

Spain's Locomotive Records (released stateside via Rykodisc) is re-releasing a lot of the thrash by Germany's Holy Moses. Fronted by the devil-doll known as Sabina Classen, this is a band that takes for its muse the San Francisco sound of early Metallica, Megadeth, Testament, etc. and does it proud justice. *The New Machine Of Liechtenstein* is a holy roller of mammoth proportions, a non-stop powerhouse of infinite guitar choogling, syncopated basslines and stop-on-a-dime drumming that adds up to a hellfire fit to crack your neckbone. Damn, but in 1992, when this first came out, I guess I was too busy devouring death, prog, power, goth, trad and black metal stylings to pay enough attention to this one. Now, 15 years later, it can finally get its due. •